

Seminars, Conferences, Addresses

The Fourth Congress of Muslim Librarians and Information Scientists

20–22 Muḥarram 1416 / 19–21 June 1995

Tehran, Iran

After a hiatus of six years, COMLIS reassembled for its fourth meeting in Tehran under the sponsorship of the National Library of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, and the Ministry of Construction Jihad (the jihad in this case being of the intellectual variety). The three previous meetings had been held in the United States (1982), Malaysia (1986), and Turkey (1989). The theme of this meeting was "Critical Issues in Library and Information Services in the Muslim World."

The congress was officially opened by Hasan Habibi (first vice president of Iran), who was followed by Muhammad Khatami (councilor to President Rafsanjani and head of the National Library), Mir Salim (minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance), and Abbas Horri (National Library of Iran). Habibi said that Iran is ready to have integrated technical collaboration with Islamic countries in information services and that Muslims need to cooperate internationally in sharing information on the Islamic cultural heritage in order to counter the information bombardment of the West.

Twenty-five papers were presented. Mumtaz Ali Anwar (chief librarian, International Islamic University, Malaysia) discussed document supply services in Muslim countries and proposed a system of international cooperation to further Muslim self-reliance. Mehdi Mohagheh (Academy of Persian Language and Literature) told of the oldest extant bibliography in the Muslim world, which was written by Ḥunayn ibn Iṣḥāq in the third/ninth century. Abdullah K. Bacha (International Islamic University Library, Malaysia) described the use of the Internet in Malaysia. Ghulam Reza Fida'i Iraqi (head, Department of Library and Information Science, Tehran University, Iran) analyzed the problems of university central libraries when their librarians have to struggle with administrators who have little understanding of the importance of academic libraries. His insights must have struck a chord in the heart of all academic librarians present. Hani Atiyah's paper, read in his absence, reviewed and criticized current Qur'anic text software.

On the second day, Abdus Sattar Chaudhry (University of Petroleum and Minerals, Saudi Arabia), a founder of COMLIS, presented "Methodology for Evaluating Library Automation Systems." Mushafarin Ansari (Tehran University, Iran) related her experience in teaching the cataloging

of manuscripts and rare books from the Islamic heritage, an area that is interesting because this is where traditional Islamic librarianship meets contemporary techniques. Abdul Rahman Kamaruddin (Islamic Development Bank) spoke on the OIC Information Network Project, a proposed international master database of Muslim databases. Syed Salim Agha's (Agricultural University, Malaysia) presented "Survival Strategies for Information Systems in Muslim Societies," an inspirational paper on how to organize our work better according to Islam.

On the third day, Sayyid Mahmud Marashi (head, Ayatollah Marashi Public Library, Qumm, Iran) told how his late father, Ayatollah al Uzma Marashi, came from Najaf to Qumm early in the twentieth century with his own library and then devoted his entire life to increasing it. It now includes one of the major Islamic manuscript collections in the world. Other papers were about the oldest extant Islamic library (in Mashhad), mosque libraries in the United States, on-line library networking in Malaysia, and the many uses of multimedia technology.

The organizing committee elected Syed Salim Agha as the new president of COMLIS, and he pledged to provide more dynamic leadership in making COMLIS fulfill its purpose of international cooperation in Islamic information services. Abbas Horri (National Library of Iran) deserves mention for the great effort he put into organizing this very successful conference. It was very well attended by Iranian librarians, making it by far the biggest conference of its kind ever held.

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